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SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN INDIGENOUS CALL ON AMBASSADOR TO CONVEY
CONCERNS ABOUT IMMIGRATION REFORM

¶1. On March 21 the Ambassador met with a group of Guatemalans calling itself the "Campaign for Life and Against the Wall." The leaders, who represented five primarily indigenous highland departments, delivered a letter addressed to the U.S. Senate as well as a petition containing approximately 10,000 signatures. The petition is titled, "U.S. Immigration Law H.R.4437...a disaster worse than Stan." The petition calls on the U.S. Senate to "consider a humane and comprehensive solution to immigration problems and to carefully examine the economic development and long-term political stability of the communities that produce migrant workers."

¶2. In very cordial terms, the Guatemalan indigenous expressed their concerns about the potential economic and social impacts on their communities if the Senate were to approve H.R.4437 in its current form. All hailed from departments with limited economic opportunities that depend heavily on remittance income from the United States. They underscored that poverty and unemployment, particularly in the highland states, forces migration and expressed their fear that loss of remittance income and the return of migrants without job prospects will have a destabilizing effect on Guatemala. They said they were concerned that the Guatemalan government was not generating jobs or economic growth, especially in rural areas. The Ambassador noted that the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) is an important first step toward encouraging investment and generating new jobs in Guatemala.

¶3. The Ambassador agreed to convey to Washington their views. He explained that comprehensive immigration reform is a top priority for the Administration. He emphasized the President's commitment to securing the border, preventing illegal crossings, and strengthening enforcement of immigration laws. He said the administration supported creation of a temporary worker program as part of an immigration reform package.

DERHAM